



University of Groningen

De brief van Jakobus

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Summary

In the preface is expounded that the present study aims at resolving the assumed riddle formed by the epistle of James: it is said to have no disposition and no theology, consisting merely of incoherent paraenesis.

In the first chapter a number of basic assumptions are formulated.

First, a survey is given of the approaches to the epistle of James so far. Roughly four positions can be discerned. The epistle is said to be a paraenesis, a specimen of sapiential literature, an antignostic writing or finally (in part) an antipauline treatise. Still there have been signs lately of a growing consensus, with various investigators suspecting a disposition and making propositions as to its nature. In addition voices are heard seeing the focus in the epistle's anthropology.

Then the relations of the epistle of James with a number of other writings are investigated, in which case it is known and notable that there are so many of them, especially with other New Testament writings. That is a clear indication that there is more here than meets the eye.

Finally, an attempt is made to come to a tentative characterization on the basis of three phenomena in the epistle: repetition, diction and inconsistencies. That leads to a tentative conclusion in three points.

The second chapter, the exegetical section of this study, offers a personal approach to the epistle of James, from three angles.

First, the structure is investigated. This structure consists of a number of homiletic sections that have afterwards been theologically framed, introduced and commented on. The older nucleus roughly consists of Jas. 2-4 and the framework of c. 1 and 5,1-11. Jas. 5,12-20 is the postscript. From these results conclusions are drawn chiefly with regard to anthropology.

Then a conclusion is drawn from the clearly polemical character of the letter with regard to the theological quality of the epistle – anthropology and ethics are also theological categories – and it is also observed that from this a number of clarifications of some parts of the epistle may be derived. As regards content we can speak of a dualistic anthropology and a corresponding dualistic view of God and the world, which may hint at a gnostic bias or origin. The spearhead of the polemic is pointed at the pauline “network”, notably Ro. 7-8 and also Ro. 3,21- 4,5.

Finally, the study of the traditions, the citations, allusions, and associations, contributes to an understanding of the peculiarities of the epistle of James, which now appears to be more and more a unity.

The third chapter, the theological section of this study, supplies a conclusion in three points with respect to the theology of the epistle of James.

First, the theology of the epistle is discussed on the basis of a number of concepts that occur in the epistle itself, such as God, Law, etc. The conclusion is that the theology of James can be characterized as pneumatic-realistic. James restores the Spirit to the body. After this, the location of the epistle is dealt with.

Finally, an attempt is made in the epilogue to characterize the epistle with the help of a more general theological concept, and to integrate it in larger contexts.

In this process the terms theocracy and theocratic are used to qualify the anthropology of the epistle, which is further defined by the coordinates of Law and Kingdom of God (Jas. 2,8).

Theocratic is the counterpart and alternative of gnostic. The epistle of James may be finally characterized as an entwining of the theocratic view and model of the Old Testament (or of Judaism) and pneumatic Christianity. With that, the author preserves the Jewish component of his Christian creed. It is the Word of God, which is also the Law of God, that creates man as active agent. That is man's essence and there lies his unity, in that answer.

With his theological treatise the author of the epistle of James has positively intended to give a synthesis of Judaism and Christianity, in such a way that he has given Christianity a Jewish denominator. He is, in this respect, the most synthetic author of the New Testament.